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Biology Student's Passion Pays Off With Award and Lab Job

Winthrop University

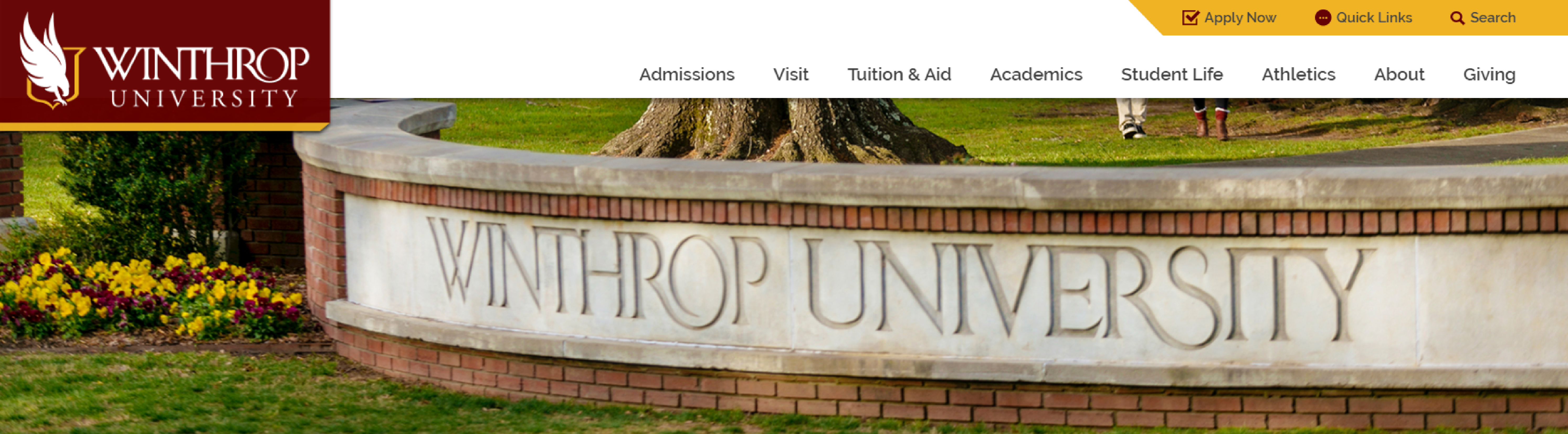
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May 22, 2018

Quick Facts

- Abraham attended the Boyce Thompson Institute REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates) at Cornell University this summer where she was one of 26 students learning how basic plant research can be applied to protect the environment, enhance human health and improve agriculture.
- Abraham was given the "champions cup" for best overall presentation.



Ellie Abraham

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — Winthrop University senior **Ellie Abraham** has a lofty goal: to use her biology degree to work in the agriculture field to help the environment and to feed the world's growing population.

And the Fort Mill, South Carolina, resident is moving quickly toward that goal.

Abraham attended the **Boyce Thompson Institute** REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates) at Cornell University this summer where she was one of 26 students learning how basic plant research can be applied to protect the environment, enhance human health and improve agriculture. Other students who attended were from Ivy League schools, top research institutions and small undergraduate focused universities such as Winthrop.

"This is an upcoming field in agriculture and we learned it is really important to help the environment as much as we can," Abraham said. "We want to use plants to help themselves as much as we can instead of using chemicals."

Over the **10-week program**, the interns worked on a supervised, independent research project and learned the latest molecular biology techniques. The group presented its research findings to group members and to leading scientists in the plant biology field.

Abraham won first place and was given the **"champions cup"** for best overall presentation.

Abraham's summer project focused on developing tools to determine the structure of a plant membrane transport protein. Using OSCA1.2, which is a rice calcium transport protein, as a proof of concept, she established methodology for determining functionality of plant membrane transporters and the stoicheometry (or number of individual molecules forming a functional transport unit) of plant transport proteins.

"This REU was a beyond amazing opportunity, and I am so grateful I was able to attend," Abraham said. "This is one of the top plant institutions in the world so to be in it to begin with was great."

With plans to graduate in December, Abraham will spend the spring working in a University of South Carolina laboratory to study how drought effects plant defense systems. She'll then enter graduate school next fall.

She tells younger college students to work hard and ask for help if they don't understand a concept. "No one knows everything in science," she said. "Scientists are all very collaborative and help each other. That's how you learn every single day."

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at longshawj@winthrop.edu or call 803/323-2404.

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